

HARPSWELL *BULLETIN*

News for Harpswell Residents & Property Owners from the Town Office – October '09

Town Web Site: www.harpswell.maine.gov

2009 TAX RATE

The Selectmen/Assessors set the 2009 tax rate at the same level as the prior year, \$6.19 per thousand dollars of assessed value. The portion of the tax rate collected for school purposes is \$4.33, for the county it is \$0.63, and for the municipal budget it is \$1.23. While the school assessment increased 1% from the prior year and the county assessment increased 5.3%, the Town budget decreased by 2.3% and overlay (the amount Assessors can raise for anticipated abatements) was reduced by 76% to enable the tax rate to remain constant.

HARPSWELL FLU CLINIC—THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 9AM-NOON and 5-7PM

The Town will host a flu clinic for residents, 18 years and older, to receive a seasonal flu vaccine, Thursday, October 8, from 9 am – noon and 5 – 7 pm. There is no charge; however, donations will be accepted.

PROPOSED FEMA CHANGES MAY AFFECT SHOREFRONT PROPERTY OWNERS

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is updating its current Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), and new base flood elevations and risk zones have been proposed for Cumberland County communities, including Harpswell. A property owner in this situation may be affected in multiple ways, including, but not limited to, flood insurance requirements, limitations on land use activities and the elimination of previously approved Letter of Map Changes (LOMC).

We encourage you to review the maps in the Code Office to become better informed about how the proposed FEMA changes may affect your property. Most changes involve modifications to base flood elevations and/or adjustments to risk zones. Additional information is available through the following websites or phone contacts:

www.floodsmart.gov

1-877-336-2627 FEMA Map Assistance Center

www.floodmaps.fema.gov

www.maine.gov/spo/flood/

The Town has been verbally notified that the initial 90-day appeal and comment period (August 20, 2009 through November 18, 2009) will change. It is likely that the deadline for appeals will be re-established for some time in early 2010. If you wish to submit an appeal or comment regarding the FEMA designation for your property, you are expected to submit technical data and information to the Harpswell Code Enforcement Officer who in turn will provide it to FEMA on your behalf.

Selectmen are working with our Congressional delegation and FEMA officials to gain a better understanding of the proposed maps and their impacts on the community, including hosting an educational forum with FEMA to be open to the public at a date and time to be determined.

MUNICIPAL REFERENDUM BALLOT ON NOVEMBER 3

In addition to the numerous statewide ballot initiatives on November 3, Harpswell voters will be asked to give consideration to two items: (1) Approval and acceptance of a \$40,000 Community Development Block Grant for infrastructure and road work at Hamilton Place, a 14-lot workforce housing subdivision, on Harpswell Neck. The grant funding will allow necessary road work to be completed this fall thereby reducing home and site costs for eligible candidates; (2) Authority for the Board of Selectmen to grant an easement to Northern New England Telephone Operations (d/b/a Fairpoint Communications) on Town-owned property for the installation of utilities for telecommunications purposes at the cell and emergency communications tower site.

SELECTMEN WORKSHOPS

The Selectmen recently held workshops with the following groups/committees: Sign Task Force/business owners, Conservation Commission, Affordable Housing Committee, Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee and Mitchell Field Implementation Committee.

At the workshop with representatives of the business community and the **Sign Task Force** the Selectmen reviewed proposed amendments to the Sign Ordinance. The Selectmen will make recommendations for further changes in the next month or so. The **Conservation Commission** updated Selectmen on the following proposed ideas: Resolution for Green Lawn Care Practices; Hildreth Road (tax-acquired parcel) as an educational test site; Cliff Trail conservation easement; Cedar Beach; and Basin Cove area of Focus Area 12. The **Affordable Housing Committee** reviewed with Selectmen its draft ordinance which includes provisions for single/double lot and subdivision development; density bonus for providing additional affordable units; affordability covenants; fees-in-lieu; off-site options; and administration by an outside authority. The **Comprehensive Implementation Committee** provided an update to the Selectmen on its work regarding the village/rural area implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. The Committee plans to hold public workshops in the next couple of months to find out from the public how the village areas might be created and what they are to look like. The **Mitchell Field Implementation Committee** discussed with Selectmen the different projects that it is focusing on such as the pier and the marine business area. The Committee is in the process of recommending a consultant to assist in the creation of zoning and performance standards for the nine-acre business site. As part of that process, public workshops should take place by late fall and early this winter. Revisions to the Economic Development Policy were also discussed for the Selectmen's consideration.

SNOWPLOWING CONTRACT

The Board of Selectmen awarded the winter snowplow contract to Goodall Landscaping of Topsham, Maine. The Town issued a request for proposal to which four companies responded. Goodall Landscaping provided the lowest bid (\$286,000) of all entities by more than \$62,000 in the first year of a three-year contract. The company demonstrated a capability to provide the level of service, equipment and personnel expected by the Town at the same cost as last year as well as including the mixing of sand and salt at no additional cost. A separate request for proposal for winter sand and delivery has been issued. The Town extends its thanks to previous contractors R.A. Webber and Harry Crooker & Sons for the service they have performed.

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

Are you aware of the Maine Residents Property Tax and Rent Refund “Circuit Breaker” Program?

You may be eligible for a partial refund of property tax assessed and rent paid during 2008 if:

- your 2008 household income was \$61,400 or less and you do not have a spouse or dependent(s); or
- your 2008 household income was \$81,850 or less and you do have a spouse or dependent(s)

AND

- your 2008 property tax was more than 4% of your 2008 household income; or
- the rent you paid in 2008 was more than 20% of your 2008 household income.

Note: Seniors do not need to meet this requirement when their household income is below \$13,900 for those living alone or below \$17,200 for those living with a spouse or dependent.

Applications for the 2008 tax year are now available. You may file online at www.maine.gov/revenue or contact Maine Revenue Service at 626-8475 to have an application mailed to you. Town Treasurer Marguerite Kelly is available to assist Harpswell residents with the application process. Please contact the Town Office at 833-5771 to schedule an appointment.

WEATHERIZATION PROGRAM

The Town of Harpswell has been awarded \$10,000 from the Cumberland County Community Development Block Grant Program to create and administer a municipal weatherization program for low to moderate income families. The Town is partnering with Habitat for Humanity to share volunteer resources, trainers and tools. Household energy evaluations will be conducted with an emphasis toward achieving low-cost improvements such as sealing heat leaks and installing double-glazed interior storm windows. Please contact Deputy Town Administrator Terri Sawyer at 833-5771 to see if you qualify or to become a volunteer. Basic weatherization will yield measurable energy savings.

HEATING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The Town wants to ensure that its residents are aware of three programs which are available to assist low- to moderate-income residents with heating fuel costs. Linda Strickland can be contacted at the Town Office for more information.

LIHEAP: This is a federally funded heating assistance program. Appointments can be scheduled by directly contacting PROP (Peoples Regional Opportunity Program) at 1-800-698-4959. It can take up to 6-8 weeks for a new application to be processed.

General Assistance: Every municipality in the State is required to administer a general assistance program which provides public assistance for basic necessities, including heat. The Town receives 50% reimbursement of its expenditures from the State of Maine.

Harpswell Heating Assistance Program: This is a Town-managed program that assists eligible households with up to 200 gallons of heating fuel per winter season.

NEW HOURS AT THE RECYCLING CENTER/TRANSFER STATION

The Recycling Center and Transfer Station are now CLOSED ON SUNDAYS & MONDAYS. Hours of operation are five consecutive days a week (Tuesday through Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.) from May 1 to December 1. The facility will also be closed on Thursdays from January 1 through April 30. (Note: The Transfer Station closes at 4:00 p.m.)

POTENTIAL CLOSURE OF WEST HARPSWELL SCHOOL

After months of consideration, the SAD # 75, now RSU # 75, Board of Directors voted to close West Harpswell Elementary School effective at the end of the 2009-2010 school year (June 2010). Before the school can be closed, the Town must hold a vote to see if Harpswell voters are willing to pay to the District the amount that would be saved by closure thereby keeping the school open. Pursuant to State law the District is required to provide the Commissioner of Education as well as the Town of Harpswell with the financial information regarding the savings achieved before a vote may be scheduled. It is not yet known when the vote will be scheduled. Should the Town vote to keep the school open, there would be a new vote in each successive year.

EXTENDED HOURS FOR ABSENTEE VOTING

The Town Clerk's Office will be open extended hours for absentee voting during the week of Oct. 26, 2009 as follows: M, T, W, F. 4:30PM – 8PM and Sat., Oct. 31, from 9AM – 2PM.